

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND DECISION RECORD
EA-NM-060-02-038**

DECISION: It is my decision to authorize the Application For Permit To Drill Or Deepen (APD), for the Excalibur 20 Federal Com. #1 gas well, submitted by Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc. The provisions for the approval of the APD will include the attachment of the Roswell Field Office requirements as defined in the following exhibits; **Exhibit A** - Location Map, **Exhibit B** - Well Drilling Requirements, **Exhibit C** - Conditions of Approval, **Exhibit D** - Permanent Resource Road Requirements, and any special mitigating measures developed in the environmental assessment.

In the event the well proves to be a dry hole, or when the well is abandoned, I recommend that reclamation requirements be attached to the well abandonment, including additional requirements imperative for the complete reclamation of the disturbed areas. These actions are subject to 43 CFR 3160 regulations for Onshore Oil and Gas operations on federal lease NM-107716.

Authority for these actions is the Mineral Leasing Act of February 25, 1920, as amended.

These actions will affect public lands described as:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

Section 20; NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, T. 15 S., R. 29 E.
1190' FNL & 2180' FWL

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, I have determined that impacts resulting from the proposed actions are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.

RATIONALE FOR DECISION: The proposed actions would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. Portions of the subject lands and adjacent lands have been used for similar purposes and all present and potential uses and users have been considered.

COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING: The construction phase of the proposed actions and subsequent operational phases will be monitored as per regulations.

signed by _____
Larry D. Bray, Assistant Field Manager,
Lands and Minerals

03/01/02 _____
Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA# NM-060-02-038

WELL NAME & NO.: Excalibur 20 Federal Com. #1

BLM Serial #: NM-107716

Section 20, T. 15 S., R. 29 E., NMPM,
1190' FNL & 2180' FWL, Unit Letter C

Chaves County, New Mexico

OPERATOR: Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc.

ACTION: Application for Permit to Drill

SURFACE/MINERAL ESTATE: Federal Minerals/Surface

I. Introduction

A. Need for the Proposed Action:

Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc. proposes to drill and complete a natural gas well at the above described location. The proposed action is needed to develop the mineral lease.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

Oil and gas development, on and off lease, is in conformance with the Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision, October 1997.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or other Plans:

The proposed action does not conflict with any known State or local planning, ordinance or zoning.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc. submitted an Application for Permit to Drill on 1/7, 2002, to drill the Excalibur 20 Federal Com. #1 gas well.

The proposed action would include:

1. The access road begins from the Aberdeen Road (249) to the proposed well pad. Of the 39,300 feet of access road, there is 100 feet of new access road construction, and about 23,400 feet of road would cross public lands. The road would have a driving surface (travelway) of 14 feet, with a maximum 30-foot wide surface disturbance area for the road construction. The proposed access road would be

constructed and maintained in accordance with the New Mexico Road Policy.

An amendment of Right-Of Way NM 105307 is Required. Total aggregated length of the amendment is 20,700 feet of existing road. The right-of-way amendment traverses through Sections 2, 11, 12, 13 and 24, T. 14 S., T. 29 E. and Sections 19 and 20, T. 15 S., R. 29 E. The amendment is needed to provide access to the Excaliber 20 Federal Com No. 1 location.

The construction of approximately 100 feet of new access road would begin from an existing road and would access the southeast corner of the proposed well pad. All other existing access roads would be maintained in as good or better condition than were existing at the commencement of operations.

2. The construction of the proposed well pad would be 285 feet long by 192 feet wide. The construction of the reserve pit would be about 150 feet by 125 feet and dug 4 feet below ground level. The reserve pit would be located on the east side of the well pad. Standard oilfield construction equipment consisting of; track-type tractors, motor graders, dump trucks, and water trucks would be used to construct the access road and well pad. A rotary drilling rig would be used to drill the well to a depth of 10,300 feet. Associated production facilities (e.g., pipeline, separator, storage tanks, etc.) would be installed during the production phase of this well. Topsoil would be stockpiled for future use over the disturbed areas.

3. Surfacing material (caliche/gravel) needed for the construction of the access road and well pad could be obtained by the operator from a federal pit in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 14 - T. 14 S. - R. 28 E., Chaves County, New Mexico.

B. Alternatives:

1. Relocate the Proposed Action:

The well location is determined on the basis of subsurface geologic information and a certain extent, by spacing regulations imposed by the New Mexico Oil Conservation District II. No other alternative location would have significantly fewer impacts than, or have a clear advantage over, the proposed location. Therefore, the alternative of changing the location involved in this action is not analyzed further in this EA.

2. No Action:

Under this alternative, the application would be rejected. None of the environmental impacts associated with the proposed action or alternate location would occur. Additionally, economic benefits of the proposed action would not be realized, and the existing environment, including the developments in place, would remain unchanged.

III. Description of the Affected Environment

A. General Setting:

The existing access road and the proposed well pad are located on federal minerals and surface, about 52 miles SE, of Roswell, N.M.. The mean annual precipitation is 10 to 12 inches. Historical and

present use of the subject lands have been limited to livestock grazing and energy development

B. Rights of Record:

An inspection of the Master Title Plats and other Bureau records revealed the following title information pertaining to valid existing prior rights on the subject lands:

- Oil and gas leases: NM-107716 - covers lease actions.
- No federally administered rights-of-way would be affected in the project area.
- No mining claims are recorded within Sec. 20, T. 15 S., R. 29 E., NMPM.

C. Affected Resources:

The following critical resources have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the proposed action or the alternatives in this EA:

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC's)
Cultural Resources (02-R-018-A & B)
Farmlands, Prime/Unique
Floodplains
Native American Religious Concerns
Threatened or Endangered Species (Plants & Animals)
Wastes, Hazardous/Solid
Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Wild & Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. Air Quality:

The area of the proposed action is considered a Class II air quality area. A Class II area allows a moderate amount air quality degradation. The primary sources of air pollution are dust from blowing wind on disturbed or exposed substratum soils and exhaust emissions from motorized equipment.

2. Soils:

The proposed action would occur in soils formed in aeolian and alluvial sediments. The soil is well drained and are shallow to shallow to indurated caliche. The soil profile is noncalcareous and mildly alkaline in the surface layer becoming moderately to strongly calcareous and moderately alkaline in the sub-soil and substratum. The soil is referred to as Simona fine sandy loam as described in the Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Southern Part (Pages 45, 46, & 67, map #110). Permeability is moderately rapid. Runoff is slow. The hazard of water erosion is slight, and the hazard of soil blowing is severe. 0 to 5 percent slopes.

3. Vegetation:

The native vegetation in the area is composed of mainly tall and mid grasses, shrubs, and forbs, such as, black grama, bush muhly, thre-awn, sand dropseed, broom snakeweed, mesquite, graythorn, and yucca.

The vegetation in the areas of the proposed action would be affected when the vegetation is cleared from the access road and well pad.

4. Invasive & Noxious Weeds:

There are no known populations of invasive or noxious weed species on the proposed access road and well pad (pipeline, rights-of way, fence line etc.)

Infestations of noxious weeds can have a disastrous impact on biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Noxious weeds affect native plant species by out-competing native vegetation for light, water and soil nutrients. Noxious weeds cause estimated losses to producers \$2 to \$3 billion annually. These losses are attributed to: (1) Decreased quality of agricultural products due to high levels of competition from noxious weeds; (2) decreased quantity of agricultural products due to noxious weed infestations; and (3) costs to control and/or prevent the noxious weeds.

Further, noxious weeds can negatively affect livestock and dairy producers by making forage either unpalatable or toxic to livestock, thus decreasing livestock productivity and potentially increasing producers' feed costs and animal health care costs. Increased costs to operators are eventually borne by consumers.

Noxious weeds also affect recreational uses, and reduces realty values of both the directly influenced properties and adjacent properties.

Recent federal legislation has been enacted requiring state and county agencies to implement noxious weed control programs. Monies would be made available for these activities from the federal government, generated from the federal tax base. Therefore, all citizens and tax payers of the United States are directly affected when noxious weed control prevention is not exercised.

5. Ground Water Quality:

State Engineers water quality list indicates useable water occurs in the Quaternary Alluvium. Deepest occurrence of useable water is 234 ft.

6. Wildlife:

Wildlife species utilizing this area for habitat include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote, fox, rabbits, kangaroo rats, pocket gophers, herptile species, as well as a variety of songbirds, dove, quail, and raptors.

No known special status species (plant/animal) or critical habitat are present within the confines of the access road and well pad.

7. Range: The access road and well pad are located on BLM grazing allotment #65075 which is permitted to Bogle Ltd. Company.

8. Visual Resources:

_____ The proposed actions are located within a designated VRM Class IV area. The setting presents a winter gray setting and in warm months, with foliage, a gray to gray-green color pattern.

9. Recreation:

The area around the proposed action site is primarily used by recreational visitors engaged in hunting, off-highway vehicle driving and caving. Other visitors include oil and gas industrial workers and ranchers.

10. Cave/Karst:

_____ No surface cave/karst features were observed in the immediate vicinity of the proposed actions. However, the proposed actions are located in a medium karst potential area.

11. Minority or Low-income Populations or Communities: The proposed actions would not affect the minority or low-income populations or communities.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A. Proposed Action Impacts:

The surface disturbance involved in the construction of the well pad, and reserve pit would total about 1.8 acres of federal surface.

1. Air Quality:

Air quality would temporarily be impacted with pollution from exhaust emissions, chemical odors, and dust that would be caused by the motorized equipment used to construct the access road, well pad, and by the drilling rig that will be used to drill the well. Dust dissemination would discontinue upon completion of the construction phase of the access road and well pad. Air pollution from the motorized equipment would discontinue at the completion of the drilling phase of the operations. The winds that frequent the southeastern part of New Mexico generally disperse the odors and emissions. The impacts to air quality would be greatly reduced as the construction and drilling phases are completed.

2. Soils:

The construction of the access road and well pad would physically disturb about 1.8 acres of topsoil and would expose the substratum soils. The exposed soils would be susceptible to wind blowing and water erosion. Surfacing the exposed soils on the access road and well pad would minimize these impacts. Construction of the reserve pit 4 feet below ground level would impact deeper soil horizons on the well pad. The impact to the soils would be remedied upon reclamation of the well pad when the stockpiled soil that was specifically conserved to establish a seed bed is spread over the well pad.

Additional soil impacts associated with lease development would occur when heavy precipitation causes water erosion damage. When water saturated segment(s) on the access road become impassable, vehicles may still be driven over the road. Consequently, deep tire ruts would develop. Where impassable segments are created from deep rutting, unauthorized drive-arounds may occur outside the

designated travelway of the access road. Road constructions requirements would alleviate potential impacts to the access road from water erosion damage.

3. Vegetation:

The construction of the access road and well pad would remove about 1.8 acres of native vegetation. If it is a producing well, reclamation would not commence until the well is a depleted producer and plugged and abandoned. Vegetation recovery on the access road and well pad would depend on the life of the well. Native vegetation would encroach on the well pad over time with only high traffic areas remaining unvegetated. If drilled as a dry hole and plugged, reclamation of the access road and well pad would immediately follow. Vegetation impacts would be short-term when the access road and well pad re-vegetate within a few years, and the reclamation of the access road and well pad are successful.

4. Invasive & Noxious Weeds:

The construction of an access road, pipeline and/or well pad may unintentionally contribute to the establishment and spread of noxious weeds. Noxious weed seeds could be carried onto the project areas by construction equipment, the drilling rig and transport vehicles. The main mechanism for seed dispersion on the roads and well pads is by equipment and vehicles that were previously used and or driven across or through noxious weed infested areas. The potential for the dissemination of invasive and noxious weed seeds may be elevated by the use of construction equipment typically contracted out to companies that may be from other geographic areas in the region. Washing and decontaminating the equipment prior to transporting the equipment onto the construction areas would minimize this impact.

5. Ground Water Quality:

The use of a plastic-lined reserve pit would reduce or eliminate seepage of drilling fluid into the soil and eventually reaching groundwater. Spills or produced fluids (e.g., saltwater, oil, and/or condensate in the event of a breach, overflow, or spill from storage tanks) could result in contamination of the soils onsite, or offsite, and may potentially impact groundwater resources in the long term. The casing and cementing requirements imposed on the proposed well would reduce or eliminate the potential for groundwater contamination from subsurface sources.

6. Wildlife:

Some small wildlife species may be killed and their dens or nests destroyed during construction of the access road and well pad. The construction of the access road and well pad could cause fragmentation of wildlife habitat. The short term negative impact to wildlife would occur during the construction phase of the operation due to noise and habitat destruction. In general, most wildlife species would become habituated to the new facilities. For other wildlife species with a low tolerance to activities, the operations on the well pad would continue to displace wildlife from the area due to ongoing disturbances such as vehicle traffic and equipment maintenance. The conditions of approval would alleviate most losses of wildlife species, such as; fencing the reserve pits, netting storage tanks, installation or other modifications of cones on separator stacks, and timing stipulations. Upon abandonment of the well, the area would revegetate and wildlife would return to previous levels.

7. Range: There would be some minor disruption of livestock grazing in the pasture, specifically on the well pad, during the construction and drilling phase of the well.

8. Visual Resources:

Facilities, such as condensate and produced water or oil storage tanks that rise above eight feet, would provide a geometrically strong vertical and horizontal visual contrast in form and line to the characteristic landscape and vegetation, which have flat, horizontal to slightly rolling form and line. The construction of an access road, well pad and other ancillary facilities, other than facilities greater in height than eight feet, would slightly modify the existing area visual resources. The proposed action is located in an area designated VRM Class IV.

The objective of Class IV is to: "Provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing landscape character...Every attempt, however, should be made to reduce or eliminate activity impacts through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic landscape elements."

The optimum method to repeat these elements would be to remove strong vertical and horizontal contrast through use of low-profile facilities as reflected in the Roswell RMP (1997, p. AP1-4). Depending on the production nature of the well site, multiple low-profile condensate and/or oil or produced water tanks could be necessary to accommodate the project.

Through color manipulation, by painting well facilities to blend with the vegetative and landscape setting, which is a gray/gray-green drab vegetative color, the view is expected to favorably blend with the form, line, color and texture of the existing landscape. The matte color *Slate Gray* from the standard environmental colors would most closely approximate the gray/gray-green color of the vegetative setting.

Cumulative adverse visual impacts can be avoided by gradually moving into a more appropriate vegetative/landform setting color scheme. Facilities with low-profile horizontal line and form would facilitate favorable blending as older facilities go out of production and are removed.

9. Recreation: There should be no impact on recreation activities.

10. Cave/Karst:

There would be no impact to known cave entrances, or karst features within the proposed action areas. However, the proposed action is located in a medium karst potential area.

11. Minority or Low-income Populations or Communities: The proposed actions would not impact the minority or low-income populations or communities.

B. Alternatives:

1. Relocation Alternative:

The alternative of changing the location involved in this action was not analyzed further because no

other alternative location would have significantly fewer impacts than, or have a clear advantage over, the proposed location.

2. No Action Alternative:

The no action alternative would constitute denial of the application. This alternative would have no consequential results from the identified environmental impacts. There would, however, be an adverse economic impact to the applicant through the denial of the lessee's right to develop the mineral reserves or through increased costs of accessing those mineral reserves through other means. There have been no significant or unmitigatable impacts identified as a result of this analysis which would warrant selection of the no action alternative.

C. Mitigation:

The Roswell Field Office; Well Drilling Requirements (Exhibit B), Conditions of Approval (Exhibit C), Permanent Resource Road Requirements (Exhibit D), and the special requirements derived from this EA, would be applied to this proposed action to minimize the surface disturbance and conserve the surrounding landscape.

D. Cumulative Impacts:

While it is likely that there will be no significant cumulative impact from the proposed action, continued oil and gas development, and other surface-disturbing activities in this area, may potentially have negative cumulative impacts on vegetation, soil, water, livestock, wildlife and visual resources.

V. Consultation and Coordination

An onsite inspection was conducted on the access road and well pad on 1/23, 2002. In attendance were Gene Simer, District Operations Manager, for Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc., and Richard Hill, Environmental Protection Specialist, BLM Roswell Field Office. Coordination and consultation has occurred with the applicant's agent. The comments and suggestions expressed during the onsite consultation have been incorporated into this EA.

Coordination and consultation has occurred with Roswell Field Office staff specialist. The comments and suggestions expressed during the review of the proposed action and environmental assessment have been incorporated into this EA.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Irene Gonzales-Salas
Irene Gonzales Salas, Realty Specialist

02-25-2
Date